



Arlington Commission for Arts & Culture

Date: Thursday, February 2 from 7:00-8:30p

Time: 7:00-8:30p

Location: Zoom

Minutes

Attending: Cristin Canterbury Bagnall, Stewart Ikeda, Lidia Kenig-Scher, Nicole Cuff, Beth Locke, Christine Noah, Tom Formicola

Absent: Steve Poltorzycki, Brian McMurray, Sarah Morgan-Wu

Guests: Terry Holt, DJ Beauregard, Laura Hanrahan, Jean Flanagan

Meeting called to order at 7:04pm.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES. Proposed by Cristin Canterbury Bagnall. Seconded by Beth Locke. Motion passed

SECRETARY UPDATE

NEW FACES

- Meet Jean Flanagan, Arlington's new Poet Laureate. Lidia Kenig-Scher introduced the commission to Jean, who is beginning a 2-year commitment as Poet Laureate. Lidia reports that the Poet Laureate Committee stands prepared to help Jean achieve her goals as Poet Laureate. For the upcoming Ceremony there will be poetry readings, readings from our Arlington Reads book, and a poetry celebration at the Dallin, where Susan Donnely will be on the agenda for reading some of her poems. Lidia reports that the committee hopes to make the literary arts position a more visible role to attract more poets laureate in the future. If anyone wants to reach out to Jean she can be reached at Jean.p.flanagan@gmail.com
- Meet DJ Beauregard, new Economic Development Coordinator. D.J. introduced himself and will be adding more to the conversation later.
- Laura Hanrahan introduced herself and expressed an interest in getting involved with the ACAC. She has been a resident of Arlington for a year, and is the Assistant Director of Events & Communications at Harvard University Center for the Environment. Laura is interested in joining and being a part of the commission.

FUNDRAISING COMM UPDATES

Christine Noah reports that a fundraising appeal was sent out to 65 people, and over \$3000 was received from 6 donors. The fundraising appeal was a success that they hope to build on. Regarding Grants, the MCC Recovery Grants were received, adding about \$12,000 extra to ACAC. In addition, there's extra money from the cultural district funding, which doubled its funding for the year. That money must be spent by the end of June. The committee will be planning on ways to spend that money. More money may be coming in from the Heights Spring Festival. For Spring, a business appeal may be in the plans, targeted with more specificity for Live Arts and First Friday Concert Series. A list will be curated with up to a dozen businesses for this endeavor. Youth Banners funding has been discussed, as the funding has fallen through for this project. Christine reports that they would like to reach out to youth to get their feedback, as well as grantees and businesses to see what funding might be acquired for Youth Banners.

Stewart added that we expect to present our case to the Finance Committee, where we get about \$35k in funding. The Commission will be asking for support, testimonial letters from businesses, neighbors, etc. D.J. added that he is hosting business meetings in the districts and invited ACAC to come along to make a pitch to those groups for more fundraising and get more sponsorships.

Stewart asked Cristin a process question regarding how projects are funded and voted on by the Commission. Cristin reported that ACAC receives an allocation from the town. ACAC is unusually well funded for a town commission ever since the various art groups were brought together under one umbrella. ACAC leverages that funding -- about \$35k -- to bring in more funding from the MCC and from local organizations and donors. Also ACAC applies for every grant there is as well as program money. If ACAC gets the program grants, it will receive about \$30k this year. Getting MCC grants leads to getting future MCC grants. All our programs and events are allocated in the budget that the commission makes decisions on back in the beginning of the fiscal year. Regarding the process for asking for funds: Ideas should be brought to community engagement or marketing first, or talk to the Grants Committee, to request funding during a fiscal year. The ACAC builds in some flexibility routinely, but the money is well managed toward the events and plans voted in by the commission. The best way to get funding for a project is at the initiating stage, before the budgets are drawn up. But there is discretionary spending built into the budget for special cases.

Beth asked that before we go to those targeted organizations Christine noted for Spring, asking for funds for our programs, to consider the fact that the other organizations in our town are looking for dollars from those same businesses and to be aware that there will be overlap. There are only so many organizations in town that are able to help.

Lidia added that we are the umbrella of all the organizations and reiterated that we should be aware of what those organizations that we represent. She commented that the organizations that ACAC represents should be coordinating with us for those fundraising endeavors.

Tom added that ACA will be seeking sponsorships in March and April, so we should make sure to coordinate those asks to the community so that ACAC and ACA aren't competing at that same time. Awareness is a good word. Tom agreed on the importance of building relationships and importance of navigating and giving others the opportunities to succeed as well.

Stewart added that we have had organization get-togethers and collaborative events in the past with these goals in mind. The COVID shut down did get in the way. But there are a lot of stakeholders in our community, and engaging with them is important. Planning the next summit of stakeholders should be a priority.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT UPDATES

Cristin shared that on February 6 the Select Board will be discussing the Youth Banners Project.

The second annual **Volunteer Engagement Zoom** was 2 weeks ago. ACAC had 9 new volunteers sign up. Some were interested in marketing and most in events organizing because they have been a part of or observed an event in town and wanted to get involved. Cristin added that she thinks it's important to have these once-a-year onboarding events for new volunteers.

Stewart: **Murals project** convened and a lot of interested people are excited and engaging in the project.

Spring Heights Festival: Janet O'Riordan also raises funds from local businesses in the Heights to plan this and other Heights events.

Lidia: There was a networking event for people in the Heights. A June festival is being planned at the Roasted Granola. There is a lot of excitement in the Heights. The arts are a big part of that, and Lidia believes that energizing the Heights with the help of the arts is very important for business and events planning. Kari Percival is having a show in February in the Heights. June will see the Black Artist Project at the Roasted Granola. There is a call for artists planned for March, April and May.

Cristin added that we have applied for a programs grant to fund the musical components -- live music -- of the next Spring Heights Festival.

Tom added that there is an opening reception for the show at the ACA coming up. Lidia and others expressed enthusiasm for the quality of the show.

DISCUSSION: ARTIST COMPENSATION

ACAC's strategic goal was developed 3 years ago. We are now on year 3 of that goal. Today, ACAC was asked to discuss artist compensation in town projects. What is appropriate to ask artists to do, how should we think about compensation for artists doing work in empty storefronts around town. This question has come up a number of times. How do we incentivize businesses to support the artists who are beautifying the storefronts? Many times, businesses propose that "exposure" in the spaces is a service to the artists. But is that really still OK?

Lidia reported that there is a call for art for some businesses on Mass Ave. And the issue is that no compensation has been offered, even for materials. Artists are a sector, just like any other business, and there should be a framework that says artists should be paid. Artists are asked to donate art for the sake of "exposure". But it doesn't work that way. The freely donated art helps the business owner or landlord. But it doesn't help the artist. ACAC pays people to create art for our utility boxes. We pay our buskers. So we need to either budget compensation in ACAC's budget or convince town businesses that artists' work has value that needs compensation.

Tom agreed that if someone is looking to do a professional job, they should offer a professional wage. Asking artists to give items or their work for free should not be done regularly. When we ask artists to paint windows and don't offer anything, the commission should take a stand.

Beth added her agreement, but she doesn't think there was an intention to NOT pay artists in the bylaw that was written to encourage landlords to beautify their empty storefronts. The term "art" was used loosely, as some of the art included drawings from elementary students.

Lidia added that we need to raise awareness that artists need to be funded.

D.J. added some thoughts about the call for art. He reported that only one artist has responded, which is proof that there is an issue with the call. The bylaw was a good first step to have the idea of addressing empty storefronts as places to put art to attract attention and beautify our town. But it's only step one. The next step, he feels, is that the landlord will pay a \$400 fee for this. But there is no language about the artist receiving anything. Not even compensation for materials. D.J. is planning to work to make a change to this bylaw so that it is more fair and equitable for the artists.

Cristin added the street performance bylaw was added about 4 years ago and designed a pilot program to work with artists to see what they needed to actually choose to busk/perform in Arlington. One of those was compensation. Promotion. And some level of infrastructure. Cristin asked if any of that work could be applied to this same issue about compensation for artists and wondered if ACAC can be a part of the solution that D.J. is seeking to figure out. Cristin added that ACAC learned that the piloting idea, being in conversation with the actual artists and asking what they need, is a very useful first step to making change happen to public policy.

Stewart asked if we think ACAC should act as curators for every call for art in the town? Does ACAC create a budget for a pilot program to allow DPCD to reach out to businesses and create a funding resource for this enterprise?

Cristin thought that ACAC could be a contributor. But that landlords should also contribute. As far as serving as a curator for this work, she doesn't see an interest in controlling the calls for art, but that ACAC can help with promotion and advising. She suggested that the town may prefer to ask ACAC to help promote the calls.

Lidia thinks ACAC should not be curating or jurying such calls for art. But she thinks ACAC or ArtLinks should be promoting it. And thinks the town could begin having a budget for this work.

A conversation grew out of this discussion about what is appropriate to ask for artists, and what level of gatekeeping do we do, in publicizing calls for art, for example in the Artists Opportunities section of the website? Do we just share all calls for art, or is there a perception that we curate them? Tom suggested that we add some language about the fact that we add Calls for Art unvetted. And allow artists to choose for themselves. Nicole agreed that having some language on the website as Tom suggested.

Stewart asked if we could as ACAC offer some compensation, or offer a contest to make beautiful work for some of these windows that are an eyesore. Maybe we consider this a pilot, to offer a contest or program to beautify windows. We can take some initiative here. Many agreed to this idea. Cristin thinks ACAC should offer a one-year solution, a pilot program that considers the conditioning of the window and putting out a call for art. But that it should just be a one year program, giving the Town time to consider this issue and act. Tom added the question, that if we decide to take this on, does it become a program that we take on long term as a role that needs to be recognized because we have town funding. Beth believes this enterprise, while admirable, enables the landlords to be inactive in renting their space, and that it may be more work for this volunteer-run commission. Having a storefront improvement program run by the town or district as a bylaw is a good first step, and ACAC shouldn't take too much on in this endeavor.

Stewart added that this may be a process that is negotiated with DPCD as a separate task force.
D.J. added that he will be doing more researching and will get back to ACAC soon.

Lidia added that she believes ACAC needs to take a stand and come out and say ACAC does not support calls for art that are not compensated.

Stewart believes that instead, we should add language to those areas where we share information that ACAC does not endorse or recommend these calls, and that ACAC communications are more like a bulletin, a resource. And that ACAC may decide to have a pilot program and address this idea head on. That idea seemed to be of interest to many commissioners, so it may be discussed in future meetings.

Terry added that ACAC should, in her opinion as a parent of an artist, be especially suspect of calls for art that are literally encouraging high school students to submit their art for free. She feels strongly that ACAC should use some language in front of such calls or do not allow them to be printed in Arts Arlington because it is taking advantage of minors, and that's a line she believes ACAC should hold.

NEW BUSINESS

D.J. reported that the parking meter in the Center: They will be shut down until the end of March. The 4-hour parking limits will still apply. These should be fixed soon.

Tom will be interviewing Beth Locke for the next "Meet Your Commissioners" piece

Terry added that the deadline for submitting for the next newsletter is Saturday at noon.

The meeting adjourned at 8:41pm.

Next meeting will be Thursday, March 2 from 7:00-8:30p